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Executive Registry

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22 March 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Prospects that the USSR Would Duplicate US Nuclear-Missile Tests in the Pacific

1. Although scientific and technical considerations do not require proof tests of nuclear-missile systems, we believe that the USSR probably tested a number of separate missile systems in its 1961 nuclear test series to satisfy military requirements. It is possible therefore that the USSR considers that it also has a requirement to conduct full-scale tests of nuclear-armed ICBM's. The prospects of adverse world reaction may have restrained Soviet leaders thus far from conducting such tests in the open sea.

2. We believe that prevailing conditions in international affairs would primarily determine whether the USSR elected to duplicate US nuclear-armed missile tests to the Pacific. Adverse world reaction to US tests might restrain Soviet leaders. Or should they elect to make similar tests they might launch nuclear-tipped ICBM's to reduced ranges, thus confining the exercise to Soviet territory. On the other hand, the USSR could cite US tests

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as a precedent and proceed with similar tests. If US tests resulted in a significant up-grading of world-wide assessments of US military strength the Soviets might feel impelled to demonstrate that they could match or surpass the US capability.

3. On balance, we believe that the chances are better than even that the USSR would follow the US lead. Such a Soviet decision, however, would not necessarily result in an intensive test series; a few tests could fulfill Soviet requirements.



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Assistant Director /
National Estimates

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